

St. Thomas Reformed Church
Nye Gade 4B
Charlotte Amalie
St. Thomas
Virgin Islands

HABS No. VI-9

HABS
VI
3-CHAM,
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington Planning and Service Center
1730 North Lynn Street
Arlington, Virginia

ST. THOMAS REFORMED CHURCH

HABS
VI
3-CHAM,
2.

Location: Nye Gade 4B, Southeast corner Nye Gade and Krystal Gade, Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, Virgin Islands.

Present Owner: St. Thomas Reformed Church

Present Use: Church.

Statement of Significance: This is a well-preserved example of a large, early-nineteenth century, religious building. The Classical Revival architectural treatment of the building as a whole is rather unusual for the Virgin Islands, but details and interior wood work are more typical.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Original and subsequent owners: The St. Thomas Reformed Church.
2. Date of erection: Cornerstone laid 18 September, 1844; Dedicated 8 February, 1846.
3. Notes on alterations and additions: There are no known or apparent alterations to the building. In the summer of 1965 the building was refurbished, including painting of the woodwork, and replacing of deteriorated portions (roughly 15% of the total area) of the interior flush wood boarding on the walls.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: The St. Thomas Reformed Church was originally a congregation of the Dutch Reformed Church of the Netherlands, but transferred its affiliation to the Reformed Church in America in 1827. It is still frequently referred to as the "Dutch Reformed Church". There have been Dutch on the Virgin Islands since the earliest European settlement in the mid-seventeenth century, and there was a Dutch Reformed church on St. Thomas by 1679. The right of the Dutch to have their own church was recognized throughout the Danish administration (1671-1917) of the Islands, and very cordial relations always existed between the Dutch church and the

established Lutheran state church. An early church building was located in the area east of Christiansfort known as the Savannah. The Reformed church was destroyed by fire in 1804, and again in 1806. For the next forty years the Reformed congregation held their services in the Lutheran Church until the present building was dedicated. The Rev. Philip M. Brett was pastor of the church when the present building was begun in 1844, and the Rev. John P. Knox when it was dedicated in 1846.

C. Sources of Information:

Primary sources: Articles from the Sanct Thomae Tidende (Newspaper published twice weekly in St. Thomas). Microfilm copy in the St. Thomas Public Library consulted for this write-up; other copies in the U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C., and the Royal Archives, Copenhagen, Denmark.

1. 18 September, 1844. Account of the laying of the cornerstone.

"THE NEW CHURCH for the DUTCH REFORMED CONGREGATION

"To day was most appropriately fixed on, for laying the corner stone of a New Temple to the Most High for the service of the Dutch Reformed Church, the ceremony was an extremely interesting one.

"The Rev'd P.M. BRETT having announced on the last Lords day that the ceremony would take place on the afternoon of the 18th inst. and respectfully invited the attendance of the Members of all other Religious denominations, at the Danish Church at 1/4 after three P.M. on that day, we are happy to be enabled to state that his wish was most amply gratified. The appointed hour having arrived, the procession moved from the Church to the site in the following order.

Band of the Jæger Corps

"Boys of the Sundry School, with their respective teachers (each with a blue rosette) bearing a blue silk banner tastefully executed, on which was inscribed 'R.D.C. Sunday School, June 1843.'

"Girls of the Sunday School and their respective teachers -- (with blue rosettes) and a blue silk banner equally rich on which was

inscribed 'The Fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom.' --We were surprised to learn that the number of scholars collected upon this occasion might be computed to about 500.

"His Excellency F von OXHOLM, and the Rev'd P.M. BRETT.

"Leut's. Hansen and Hjardemaal Aids to His Excellency

"Captains Wolff, Haagensen, James, and other officers

"N. Fugl, J. Neish, Jas. Wright and P. van Vlierden, Esqrs. office bearers, of the Dutch Church.

"Rev'd J.F. TOLDERLUND and Wardens of the Lutheran Church

"Rev'd E Hartvig Pastor of the Moravians followed by a numerous concourse of ladies and gentlemen of all creeds and denominations. The procession was enlivened by the band playing in good style many agreeable pieces of music which afforded gratifying evidence of their improvement and efficiency considering their comparatively recent organization.

"Upon the arrival of the procession at the ground the ceremony was opened by the band playing the National Anthem

"The children having been arranged as well as the pressure of the assembled throng would admit of -- the Rev'd P.M. Brett offered a prayer suitable for the occasion -- which being concluded, the Band played the old 100th.

P.v. Vlierden Esq. warden then read a History of the congregation, from its first establishment up to the present time and his Excellency F. von Oxholm proceeded to lay the corner stone; we were most agreeably surprised at witnessing the dexterity with which His Excellency handled the trowel.

"When this part of the ceremony was finished the Rev'd P.M. Brett delivered an address which we insert below, it needs no eulogy from us -- it is simple and affecting, it breathes a spirit of piety which speaks to the heart -- it is not a composition of polished phrases and well turned periods, but a homely and stirring appeal befitting the solemnity of the occasion.

"The Rev'd J.F. Tolderlund, the Danish Minister, then delivered a suitable address highly complimentary to the Rev'd P.M. Brett after which the children sang one of the Doxologies, and the Moravian Pastor, the Rev'd E. Hartvig, concluded the ceremony by

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ST. THOMAS REFORMED CHURCH
HABS No. VI-9 (Page 4)

delivering a Benediction, and the procession retired. the children of the Sunday school, with their Teachers returned to the Danish Church, where after singing a hymn they were dismissed.

"Respected Elders and Members of the
REFORMED DUTCH CHURCH.

"The interesting occasion which calls us together this day, is one well calculated to awaken the deepest emotions, and kindle the warmest gratitude of your hearts.

"Precisely one Century has elapsed, since this congregation was first planted on these Western shores. And during that long period of one hundred revolving years; has the Almighty kindly watched over the interest of your beloved Zion. And after protecting her through many vicissitudes -- He! has now crowned his mercies by permitting you this day to found another house of Worship.

"Since the year 1744, from which this Church dates her origin -- at least three generations of her members have slept the sleep of death. Her early founders and their children, have long ere! this mingled with their parent clay -- ashes to ashes -- and dust to dust: but still with undiminished numbers and untarnished Glory! our Zion lives. Amid a thousand changing scenes, God hath spared her: though she hath suffered many sore afflictions -- though her noble place of worship has been razed to the ground by the destructive elements. Though for 17 years deprived of the sacred Ministry. Though called to witness seasons of fearful degeneracy; our Zion still lives. Though severely tried in the furnace of affliction, she still lives in youthful vigour, and so far from overwhelming -- her trials have rather purified her and made her more zealous and devoted to the cause of God.

"And now we trust that the dark days of our Zion are over, and that once again she will flourish in all her pristine glory. Many of your Fathers (who have gone to rest) have desired to see this day -- but for you has this privilege been reserved to witness the foundation of this Holy Temple.

"Surely then, Oh! surely, your hearts should burn with warmest love and gratitude to Almighty God, for this signal evidence of his Mercy toward you. And Oh! that you may ever show yourselves worthy of this favour, and that you may evince your gratitude, not in words only, but in every deed and truth! May the work which you have this day commenced long stand a monument of God's grace towards you; and of your thankfulness to him! May it ever be to you, and to your childrens children the House of praise and the very gates of Heaven! May it ever prove the safe Repository of the truth, as it is in Jesus, and be the birthplace of a thousand immortal souls! May the Father, Son, and Holy spirit the only wise and true Jehovah! bless and prosper this work, which his servants have commenced in his Name.

"And now most Honored Governor permit me in behalf of the Elders and members of this congregation, to return you many thanks for the favor you have done us. It is indeed a glorious sign when our Rulers are willing to unite with us in advancing the Redeemers cause. We hail the token with delight as the harbinger of better things. Long may you live sir! as a faithful servant to your Heavenly King as you always have been to your earthly sovereign. And permit us to express through you, in the most respectful manner; our great obligations to his Excellency Governor General von Scholten, for the deep interest, he has manifested in this work from its very commencement; assure our respected chief magistrate, that his disinterested kindness will be long remembered by the Reformed Dutch Congregation.

"Permit me also to thank you Beloved brother in Christ, and the congregation over which you preside, for the many favors we have received at your hands. For at least 15 years our churches have been united in the closest bonds of brotherly love -- Through that long space of time (as far as I am aware nothing has occurred to interrupt our harmony. Peace has reigned over our mutual counsels, and christian love has never been sundered. Under these circumstances, we separate from you with deep regret and nothing but necessity has compelled us to this course. But while we thus separate, we earnestly desire, that our mutual love and christian fellowship may never be disturbed. Though in some points of religious

may differ, yet in the great Essential; 'Christ and him crucified' -- we agree with most perfect unanimity. Let our only strife then be, who shall love that Savior most and serve him best.

"To you also fellow citizens, who have assisted us by your subscriptions, we return many thanks. Through your kind aid we have been enabled to proceed in our work; without it, our success would have been doubtful. We feel most happy that in this matter all religious bigotry has been laid aside, and that the children of Abraham have united with the followers of Luther, with the churches of England and of Rome, to assist in the building of this Temple to the Lord. Long may that Catholic Spirit of benevolence prevail, and far distant be the day when envious bigotry shall prevail in its stead.

"And now my friends last but chief of all our earthly benefactors, we would mention with profound respect the name of our beloved Sovereign King Christian VIII. The friend of religion, the defender of the Christian faith and the firm protector of liberty of conscience, he is worthy of our warmest admiration,-- Long may he live to reign over us -- And long may we prove his most faithful subjects.

2. 7 February, 1846. Invitation to the dedication of the new church to be held on 8 February 1846.

"THE Pastor and Wardens of the Reformed Dutch CHURCH announce to the public that their new place of worship will be opened for dedication, on Sabbath the 8th inst. at 12 o'clock noon, on which occasion, they invite the attendance of the other congregations of this town.

N.B. -- It is hoped the owners of pews in the Church will endeavour as far as possible to afford accommodation to such strangers as may attend. A collection will taken up in aid of the building fund.

3. 11 February, 1846. Publication of a resolution of thanks to the participants in the choir at the dedication service.

"THE Pastor and Wardens of the Reformed Dutch Church at a late meeting, adopted the following

resolution:

"That our hearty thanks are due to the ladies and gentlemen who so kindly lent their assistance in the Choir, and who so admirably executed their part in the solemnities of the last Sabbath, and that this resolution be made known to them through the St. Thomas Times."

"The Pastor would give notice that the services in the Church on Friday next will be held at 4 p.m. instead of 12 noon.

4. "11 February, 1846. Account of the dedication of the new church held on 8 February, 1846.

"Dedication of the New Church for the Reformed Dutch Congregation."

"THIS interesting and sacred ceremony, so long, and so anxiously looked for by every member of the Dutch Congregation in this city, took place, agreeably to public announcement on Sunday last, the 8th instant.

"The Church was crowded at an early hour, and it is but an act of simple justice to state, that the Wardens and Elders with prompt attention exerted themselves to procure accommodation for the numerous visitors, members of other communions, who attended on the occasion -- and we may add with complete success. Among the most distinguished whom we take leave to mention, were, His Excellency, Governor F. v. Oxholm and suite viz: Brand Major Holm, and Captains Gruner and Hansen.

"Lieutenant Colonel Precht and lady. Captains Haagensen and James and their ladies. The Rev'd Mr. Tolderlund of the Lutheran congregation and lady. The Rev'd Mr. Nathan of the Hebrew congregation and lady. The Rev'd Mr. Graves of the Baptist Church, Editor of the Boston Reflector. The Rev'd Mr. Vogler of the Moravian congregation, and the majority of the Wardens and Elders of the several churches in this town with their ladies and families were also present.

"The service commenced with a brief but extremely appropriate prayer by the Pastor, (the Rev'd J. P. Knox) which was followed by the choir singing the 1st part of the 132nd Psalm, and next the Ten Commandments were read by the Rev'd Mr. Tolderlund, and immediately after, the 24th Psalm, commencing: --

ST. THOMAS REFORMED CHURCH
HABS No. VI-9 (Page 8)

"'The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world, and they that dwell therein'

"The choir then sang the 99th Hymn, second Book, and the Pastor continued the service by offering up the following dedicatory Prayer, first reading the following introduction: --

"'Dearly beloved in the Lord, for as much as devout and holy men as well under the law as under the gospel, moved either by the express command of God, or by the secret inspiration of the blessed spirit, and acting agreeably to their own reason and sense of the natural decency of things, have erected houses for the public worship of God and separated them from all unhallowed, worldly, and common uses, in order to fill men's minds with greater reverence for his glorious majesty, and affect their hearts with more devotion and humility in his service, which pious works have been approved and graciously accepted by our heavenly father, let us not doubt but that he will also favourably approve our godly purpose of setting apart this place in solemn manner, for the performance of the several offices of religious worship, and let us faithfully and devoutly beg his blessing on this our undertaking.'

"The prayer opened with an invocation to, and adoration of the Almighty God, succeeded by thanksgivings being rendered, with devout expressings of humility, for the mercy and goodness of our Heavenly Father, in conferring upon a guilty world, the inestimable -- the precious gift of a Saviour the ever blessed spirit, His word, His Majesty, His Ordinances and His Church; after which the Pastor implored the Divine blessing upon the House of Worship then being set apart, and earnestly besought God to bless his various Ordinances as they should be hereafter administered, and that he would confer upon his people the graces of His Holy spirit, and convert sinners from the errors of their ways. Then followed renewed thanksgivings for all the mercies which God had granted in times past to the Universal Church in every land, and his children in this place; and the prayer closed with devout petitions in behalf of Our Gracious Majesty, King Christian 8th., the Royal Household, our governing authorities, the late Pastors of the Church, the various denominations in this place, and the congregation then assembled.

"The service was then continued with a sermon delivered by the Pastor. Text Psalm 48th, 12th and 13th verses.

"'Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof.'

"'Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following.'

"The Reverend Gentleman commenced his discourse by an explanation of the Theme chosen by the inspired Psalmist, viz; the miraculous interposition of the Almighty, in the reign of Jehoshaphat King of Judah, to rescue his chosen people from destruction -- when the Moabites and Ammonites, an exceeding great Host invaded Jerusalem. This portion of the sermon will be found fully explained by comparing the psalm with the 20th chapter of the second book of Chronicles, and the text is an injunction to the Israelites on their deliverance from their enemies, and safe return to their beloved Zion -- i.e. literally, but the Rev'd Gentleman pointed out most lucidly that it admitted of another and more significant construction to them as christians. Their church was their Zion, and he would go round about her. tell the towers thereof, mark well her bulwarks, that they (his listners) might tell it to the next generation.' Accordingly, he proceeded to give a condensed but highly interesting account of the Reformed Dutch Church from the earliest period of its History, its rise and progress in the mother country, the awful persecutions it underwent, and the piety, steadfastness, and devotedness of its first disciples to the pure and apostolical faith they had embraced. Warmly! and eloquently! he eulogised their tolerance and their christian charity as exemplified in the reception and assistance they afforded to the fugitive Hugenots when compelled to flee from France -- and to the Scotch covenanters when driven from their native land into exile by the 'bloody Claverhouse.' It was to them that the Pilgrim Fathers first fled for protection and succour, it was with them they found a secure and hospitable asylum till they embarked for the shores of the New World. It was in Holland first, and through the Reformed Dutch church that the Israelites enjoyed civil and religious liberty, tolerance and freedom of conscience, and nobly had they repaid the debt of gratitude.

"The Rev'd Gentleman dwelt in eloquent strain upon this division of his subject, and then on the

establishment and rise of the Church in America, its missionary labours, and many points which though highly interesting, we are compelled to exclude from this brief Review.

"He next gave a short but necessarily rather obscure history of the foundation of the Church in this Island, the various vicissitudes it had undergone and its present flourishing condition. It is indeed much to be regretted that the records of the congregation are incomplete, nor is it to be wondered at when we reflect how many calamities have befallen this city in common with all the neighbouring Islands during the past period of one century and a quarter, prior to which we have incontestible proof that a Dutch congregation had been gathered together, as in the year 1718, a Dutch church. (probably the first one erected) was in existence. Having concluded the Historical portion of his discourse the Rev'd Gentleman dilated in succession on the Government Doctrine and Spirit of the Dutch Reformed church, with which, as we presume the majority of the readers of this article are intimately acquainted, it appears to us unnecessary to recapitulate. At the close of the discourse the Rev'd Gentleman in stating that a collection would be taken up, explained in a few words that it had been rendered necessary by sundry expenses having been incurred for the accommodation of the congregation and the decoration of the church which had not been originally contemplated.

"The Rev'd Mr. Tolderlund then offered up a very impressive prayer, and while the collection was being made the choir sang an anthem. The service was then continued with the 124th Hymn, 2nd book, and concluded with a Benediction by the Rev'd Mr. Vogler of the Moravian church. Ere we close our account of this ceremony which we are persuaded will render the day memorable in the hearts of all attached to the society, we deem it our incumbent duty to state that too much praise cannot be awarded to the ladies and gentlemen who on that occasion voluntarily rendered their services in the choir. The singing was excellent, so good indeed that we did not miss the Organ. Some of the voices were particularly fine but

as it is a delicate point where all so cheerfully performed their labour of love we must refrain from particularizing. Some idea may be formed of the want which existed, religiously we speak for the new church, when we state that every seat in the body of the church and all the front seats in the galleries are let, and that numbers are disappointed who cannot procure sittings unless the free seats in the gallery be further encroached on. Surely such a state of things ought to urge the influential members of the Episcopal congregation to come forward, and organize some plan of carrying into effect their long talked of intention to erect an edifice for their own especial use. Of this we are certain -- that if some means be not devised ere long to provide for the spiritual wants of the English congregation, as it is sometimes termed, the succession from its ranks will be so general that the measure will no longer be necessary.

Published sources:

1. Knox, John P., A Historical Account of St. Thomas, W. I. (New York: Charles Scribner, 1852), p. 144. Though it is based largely on earlier published works in Danish, this is still one of the basic works in English on the history of St. Thomas. Although the author was the minister of the Reformed Church when it was dedicated in 1846, the book contains disappointingly little on the history of its construction.
2. Larsen, Jens, Virgin Islands Story (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1950), pp. 22, 147, 148, 150.
3. Larsen, Kay, Dansk Vestindien, 1666-1917 (Copenhagen: C. A. Reitzels Forlag, 1928), p. 250.
4. Westergaard, Waldemar, The Danish West Indies under Company Rule (1671-1754) with a Supplementary Chapter, 1755-1917 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1917), pp. 190, 191, 210, 214.
5. Brøndsted, Johannes, editor, Vore Gamle Tropekolonier, Vol. II: Dansk Vestindien (Copenhagen: Westermann, 1953), p. 423, watercolor view p. 515.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The building remains practically as built and has retained its original form, details, finishes, etc. It is not typical for the former Danish Virgin Islands and varies from other classical revival structures on the islands in its architectural treatment. Details and interior wood work, however, follow the standard island practices of the early 19th century.
2. Condition of Fabric: The church is in fair condition and is fairly well maintained.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: Two stories, rectangular, 75' x 50'. The building is three bays wide by five bays deep with the projecting portico to the front an additional bay deep. It is symmetrical in all respects on the exterior and interior around an east-west axis.
2. Foundations: Brick and rubble masonry articulated on the exterior by a slightly projecting base at the first floor level.
3. Wall construction: Stuccoed brick masonry with painted joints to simulate cut stone.
4. Porches, etc.: On the entrance side the building has a colonnade the full height of the building supporting a high triangular pediment with classical revival moldings that continue in the cornice along the sides and rear of the building. The colonnade consists of four Tuscan columns on a plinth stepped down on its three exposed sides (five steps).
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The church has five exterior doors, three towards the front and one on each side in the westernmost bay. The openings of the three doors toward the front are identical.

except for a framed marble plaque set in the masonry above the center one. They all have slightly projecting surrounds treated as pilasters with flat heavily molded heads; exterior shutter doors, one panelled on the exterior and three panelled on the interior; and interior jalousie doors in four folding sections with fixed louvers. The side doors have slightly projecting plain surrounds, exterior shutter doors, and double interior jalousie doors with fixed louvers.

- b. Windows: All window openings and windows are alike. They have slightly projecting surrounds and projecting sills with ornamental brackets, exterior solid wooden shutters and interior jalousies with fixed louvers.

6. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: Low gable roof with metal roofing.
- b. Cornice: As mentioned above, the classical revival cornice runs all around the building.

- 7. Stoops: The side entrances have masonry stoops with five steps leading down to the grade level.

C. Description of Interior:

- 1. Floor plan: The entire interior is occupied by one large room with a U-shaped balcony along the sides and rear.
- 2. Stairways: Two, two-run L-shaped staircases lead to the balcony along the walls of the northwest and southwest corners. The staircases are constructed in wood.
- 3. Flooring: Both the balcony and the main floor have wooden flooring.
- 4. Wall and ceiling finish: All walls are finished in wooden flush boarding. Ceilings under and above the balcony have flush wooden sheathing. The balcony is supported on free, wooden Tuscan columns on pedestals, (six on either side and two at the rear) with a heavily molded architrave.

ST. THOMAS REFORMED CHURCH
HABS No. VI-9 (Page 14)

The balcony has a panelled railing which, along the sides, supports columns similar to and aligned with those on the first floor. The second story columns carry a deep and widely projecting cornice that continues across the end walls of the church hall and defines the deep cove wooden ceiling over the central section of the auditorium within the balcony.

Doors and windows are painted a dark red, jalousies green, steps a dark gray, handrails black and all other woodwork (except for the floors which have been left natural) is painted white. The church has its original pews all facing a large mahogany communion table and pulpit centered against the east wall. There are six rows of 19 pews arranged on both sides of a center and two side aisles. A pipe organ and choir stalls are located on the balcony against the west wall above the front entrances. The two-rank pipe organ, made by Hall and Labagla of New York in 1846, is unused and in dilapidated condition. There are several memorial plaques.

5. Hardware: The church has retained most of its original hardware which consists of box locks, spring latches with porcelain knobs, wrought iron strap, wing and H hinges, storm hooks, and bar brackets.
6. Lighting: The building is wired for electricity. There is no heating.

D. Site:

General setting: The church is situated on the southeast corner of Nye Gade and Krystal Gade and faces west; it occupies almost all of the lot. The narrow front and side yard toward the streets are bordered by a wrought iron picket fence set between brick pillars with gates and bridges over the deep gutters in front of each door. The slightly wider side yard towards the south has a small tool and storage shed toward Nye Gade. Except for an open lot in front of the church it is surrounded by one, two and three story buildings of urban character.

Prepared by Frederik C. Gjessing, Architect
National Park Service
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